

This Week in Washington

Veteran's Day

Originally commemorating the end of World War I (November 11, 1918), Veteran's Day today celebrates the service of all our military forces. Veteran's Day is largely intended to thank living veterans for their service, to acknowledge their contributions to our national security, and to underscore the fact that all those who served - not only those who died - have sacrificed and done their duty.

I take great pride in representing the veterans of our great Nation. The United States owes them a debt which can never be fully repaid. After years of service and devotion, veterans should be able to count on their country for support.

First and foremost, the current backlog of disability claims at the Veterans Administration needs to be fixed. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi indicated that during his tenure the VA will make the backlog of disability claims a primary focus.

Already, the number of veterans waiting more than six months for primary care has been reduced from more than 300,000 to less than 50,000. Further, the average number of days before the next appointment is available has been reduced from 60 to 24 for primary care and from 62 to 30 for specialty care. I feel this assistance is of utmost importance to the quality of life of our veterans and will hold Mr. Principi to his pledge.

Additionally, I am working diligently in support of several legislative proposals for veterans. First, the Retired Pay Restoration Act, H.R. 303, would end the current practice of deducting disability benefits from the amount of retirement pay a veteran receives. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 303 and have consistently supported this concurrent receipt proposal.

Most recently, the House of Representatives included a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 to provide concurrent receipt to more veterans than ever. Effective January 1, 2004, all 20-year military retirees with a Purple Heart or combat-related disability, including national guardsmen and reservists, will be eligible for concurrent receipt. Over the next ten years, concurrent receipt will be phased in for the remaining military retirees who are the most severely disabled (50% and above).

I also introduced the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center Act, H.R. 1442. This legislation, which recently passed the Congress, authorizes the design and construction of a visitor center for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This memorial will allow self-guided tours for small groups and serve as a facility to collect remembrances of those whose names are inscribed on the Memorial.

Finally, I am a cosponsor of the Veteran's American Dream Home Ownership Assistance Act, H.R. 1742. This legislation would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 with respect to the eligibility of veterans for mortgage bond financing. H.R. 1742 would make it easier for Veterans to purchase their own homes.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "A man who is good enough to shed his blood for his country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards." I agree—the restoration of respect, morale and higher standards of living for our veterans and their families is of personal importance to me. I urge you to join me this Veteran's Day to thank all our military retirees and reflect on their sacrifices for our great Nation.

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Veteran's Events in the 11th Congressional District

Danville—10:30a.m. -- Public invited. Ceremony to give medals from the Republic of Korea to U.S. Veterans. Community Presbyterian Church, 222 West El Pintado Road, Danville.

Danville—Sycamore Valley Rotary Veteran's Day Event 5:30p.m. at the Crow Canyon Country Club - Keynote Admiral Tom Brown

Lodi—Veteran's Day Observance and Community Picnic 11a.m. at Lodi's All Veterans Plaza

Stockton—Veterans of Foreign Wars All American Luneta Post 52 memorial service at 11a.m. Tuesday. Open to the public and will take place in front of the Stockton Memorial Civic Auditorium. Guest speakers will include Lt. Col. Dick Loesch and Mayor Podesto, while students from the Edison High School ROTC Color Guard will present and post the colors. Information: (209) 941-8391.

Tracy—Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Menusa, Tracy's first man killed in the Iraq war, will be memorialized at 11 a.m. Tuesday when his name is inscribed in a monument next to Tracy's Community Center, 300 E. Tenth St.

Linden—Linden's Veterans Memorial Committee and Linden Unified School District will host an open house from 11 a.m. to 12:30p.m. Tuesday at Linden Veterans Memorial, 18527 E. Main St., Linden. There will be a remembrance ceremony and flag raising.